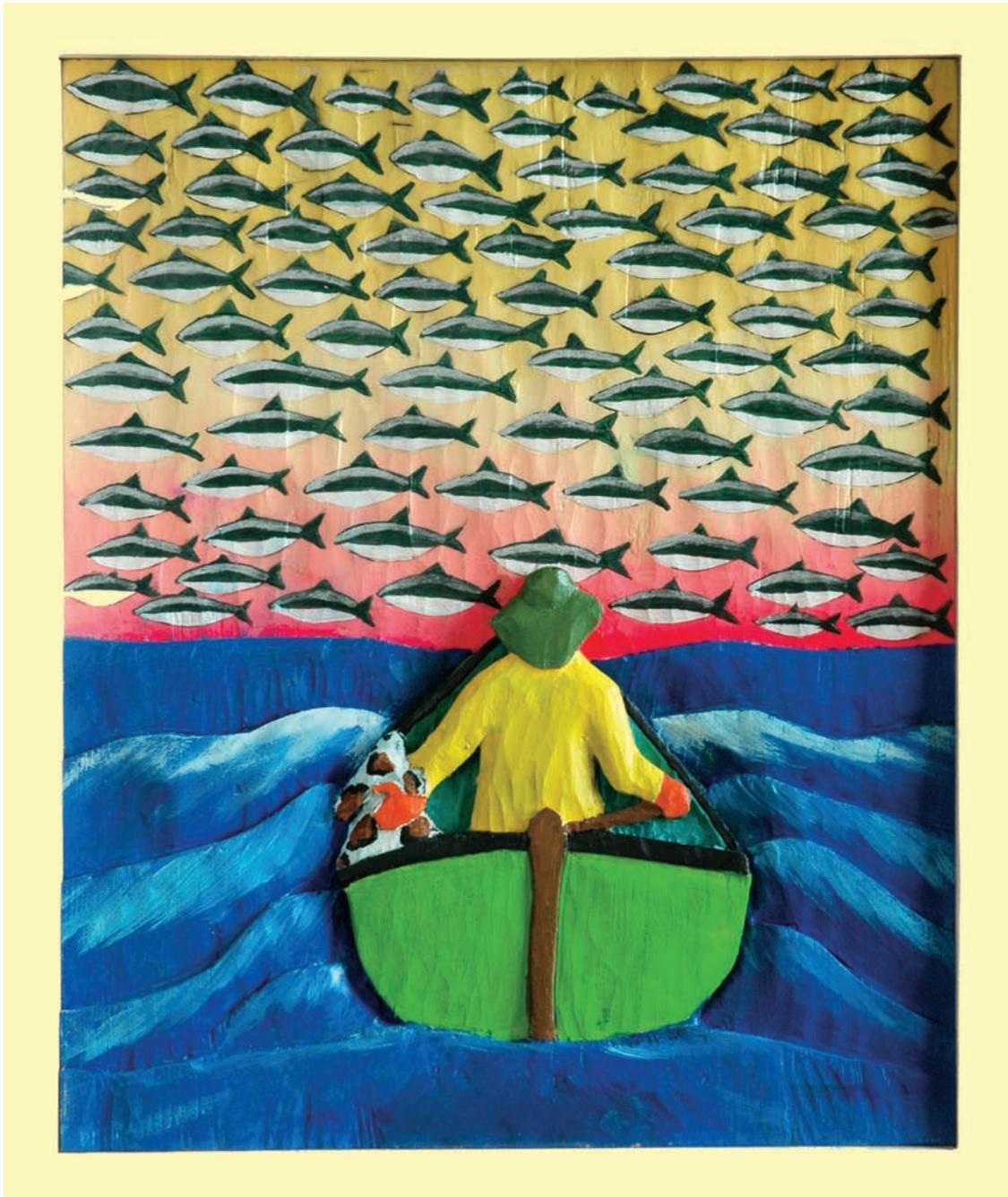


FROM FOLK ART TO SEAFOOD

DISCOVER NOVA SCOTIA'S TREASURES

BY MICHAEL VAUGHAN

IT WAS LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT; AN AMAZING WORK OF ART CALLED *MACKEREL SKY* ON THE POSTER FOR THE 23RD ANNUAL NOVA SCOTIA FOLK ART FESTIVAL IN LUNENBURG.



There was something magical about this work, a fisherman and his canine companion sitting in a boat watching a rainbow-coloured sky filled with mackerel. Just seeing it lifted my spirits and took me back to the days when, as a student, I visited Yarmouth every August for the annual intercollegiate tuna-fishing match.

Each morning, we arose in total darkness; the sky an indicator of the weather lying ahead. Occasionally, as the sun struggled to rise, it was obscured with clouds that seemed to take on the distinctive thatched markings of a mackerel. Sailors called it the “mackerel sky.” For some it meant bad weather; but for me, it suggested brighter conditions lay ahead.

I made my mind up to revisit Nova Scotia and discover its artistic treasures. Wanting more information on the *Mackerel Sky*, I discovered it was specially created by the 2011 Festival’s featured artist, Douglas Dorcken. He uses a chisel and knife on a single piece of wood creating figures and landscapes on a three-dimensional effect. Kiln-dried pine, poplar or a “sea-seasoned” wood is used to create his relief carvings. Following in the footsteps of his shipwright father, he took up carving after retiring from a career in the navy in 1994.

Once fixed on a subject, Dorcken sketches the images in pencil on the wood and then begins the creative process: “Before I start a new project, I sit on my carving stool and turn the wood over and over, studying each side and I try to picture fishermen and other people I know.”

HALIFAX HAUNTS

Folk art is not new to Nova Scotia; Joe Norris and Maud Lewis are world-renowned art icons. Maud was born on March 7, 1903 and was disabled as a result of juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. She began her artistic career by hand-drawing Christmas cards. These proved popular with her husband’s customers as he sold fish door-to-door and he encouraged her to begin painting. Her subjects often depicted oxen, horses or cats. Their tiny house, consisting of one room with a sleeping loft, is now located in the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia in Halifax. Along with the Maud Lewis display, make sure you see *Show of Hands*.

Other Halifax must-sees include the large, new as well as the old “original” Farmers’ Markets, the entire wharf area (including the terrific wine shop at Bishop’s Landing) and the Maritime Museum. My dining destination is the Chives Canadian Bistro with owner-chef Craig Flinn at the helm. Not to be missed are his appetizers: smoked Yukon gold potato “Chowdah” or curried coconut mussels. Best entrée? Try Bill Wood’s lamb “Milanese” with saffron parmesan risotto.



LUNENBURG LOCALES

As for Lunenburg, you will love this amazing UNESCO World Heritage Site. With so much to see en route, make sure you’re not late for Nova Scotia’s one and only Folk Art Festival. It takes place on the first Sunday in August and opens exactly at 12 noon with a countdown—“5, 4, 3, 2, 1”—when the doors swing open and the mad rush begins. Then suddenly—poof—it’s over in less than four hours.

This is serious stuff. Sponsored by the Lunenburg Heritage Society, this juried event showcases some of Nova Scotia’s best artists. More than 1,000 people line up for hours ahead to get in first. Parking is available and tickets are just \$5 for adults (children are free) with live music, snacks, door prizes and an auction.

There is no question that the early bird gets the worm. Attached to each carving, painting or hooked rug is a five-part “ticket.” When you decide on a piece, the artist will tear off the bottom four tickets, leaving only the top portion still attached to the folk art. You then take the tickets to the cashier who, after payment, will give you two tickets for each item purchased. One is your receipt; the other is to present to the artist to collect your piece. A representative from UPS can wrap and ship your purchases home.

If you can’t make this event, there are many local folk art galleries to visit, such as The Spotted Frog. Lunenburg is a hot bed of art—even restaurants feature local artists. Finding a place to stay on the South Shore can be tricky and this is where word of mouth, your own personal likes and dislikes and budget are paramount. The annual *Doers’ & Dreamers* travel guide is indispensable.

Fortunately, I chanced upon the just-opened picturesque Corkums Island Mussel Farm seafood shop on Masons Beach Road. It offers fantastic fresh shellfish, scallops and lobster and is open seven days a week in the summer. Call aquaculturalist Dale Cook to check availability (902-527-8359). As I was staying with friends who had rented a grandiose house overlooking the ocean, we had our own seafood festival complete with some tasty Nova Scotia whites and a fruity sparkler called NOVA 7 from Benjamin Bridge Winery located in Wolfville’s Gaspereau Valley (approximately \$25).

opposite: *Mackerel Sky* by Douglas Dorcken. Garry Woodcock

above: The beauty of Southwest Nova is found along its shorelines, in its quaint communities and among its gracious residents. Michael Vaughan



Try the tasty lamb “Milanese” with saffron parmesan risotto at Chives Bistro. Michael Vaughan

TRAVEL PLANNER

For more information, visit:
 Southwest Nova Scotia:
destinationsouthwestnova.com
 Nova Scotia Folk Art Festival:
nsfolkartfestival.com
 Town of Lunenburg:
explorelunenburg.ca

Here’s a tip: while exploring Lunenburg, make sure that you drop into the Ironworks Distillery located in the Blacksmith’s Shop for a tasting of the local handcrafted spirits.

Ditto for the LeHave Bakery, just south of Lunenburg (including a short ferry ride). Three bags of their amazingly delicious homemade granola did not last long enough—I should have bought six. The bakery also serves snacks (curries on Saturday) and has a craft co-op downstairs.

WOLFVILLE GEMS

If you have time, drive over to Wolfville to find my No. 1 Nova Scotia dining destination: Tempest owned by Nova Scotia culinary genius chef Michael Howell. His signature chowder with finnan haddie and chorizo was superlative as was virtually everything I tasted on the menu. Better yet, prices are very reasonable.

There are many undiscovered gems. Just south of Wolfville in Berwick, a new tiny casual organic café called The Black Trumpet is operated by Henry and Dora Penner.

There are many local wineries around Wolfville. The nearby Luckett Vineyards would be a destination with their tasty Ortega and L’Acadie whites and noteworthy Scarlett Apple Cranberry at only \$15. Their best, however, is their seductive Cordelia Blackberry Port at \$27 per half litre. Thankfully a little goes a long way. Budding gourmets should visit tasteofnovascotia.com.

With so much to see and taste in Nova Scotia, I am sure that you too will want to come back and continue exploring its innumerable nooks and crannies. Personally, I love the sunny warmth of those late August and early September days. I will be keeping an eye out for that mackerel sky and have already marked Sunday, August 5 for the 24th annual Folk Art Festival. ■

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